

# UNDERWATER INNOVATIONS

THE FLORIDA SPRINGS PHOTOGRAPHY OF  
BRUCE MOZERT



**January 9 to February 28, 2020**

at the

Gallery for Innovation and the Arts

Presented by

**STATE ARCHIVES**  
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Bruce Mozert was born in Newark, Ohio, on November 24, 1916. His interest in photography began in his 20s while working as a film developer for *Life* magazine photographer Victor de Palma in New York City. It wasn't long before Mozert was shooting his own photographs and accepting jobs nationwide as a freelance photographer. On his way to photograph women's shoes in Miami in 1938, he stopped in St. Augustine and learned that actor Johnny Weissmuller was shooting a Tarzan movie at Silver Springs. Mozert took a detour to the springs and photographed the actor and crew on set. Impressed with his photographs, Silver Springs offered him a job at the springs.

Working at Silver Springs, Mozert continued honing his photography skills. He learned about underwater photography during his first year at the springs. After observing the Tarzan camera crew filming underwater, Mozert designed his own underwater camera housings so he too could capture scenes below the water's surface. Mozert's most memorable photographs are those in which he has models reading magazines, teaching classes and playing music—all while underwater.

After serving as a photographer in the U.S. Army during World War II, Mozert returned to Silver Springs and was hired as the official springs photographer. His photographs of glass-bottom boats, models leaning against the lucky horseshoe palm and others were used in nationwide campaigns to attract tourists to the area when they were traveling through Florida. The publicity campaigns worked, and hundreds of thousands of guests visited the springs each year.





Not everyone was allowed to enjoy the springs, though. Jim Crow laws in the South excluded black families from the facilities, so Silver Springs owners, Carl Ray and William "Shorty" Davidson, opened Paradise Park for black families on Emancipation Day 1949. Paradise Park was located about a half mile downriver from the springhead and offered almost all of the same attractions to black visitors.

Ray and Davidson hired Eddie Vereen as the manager. Vereen held that position from 1949 until his retirement in 1967. The success of Paradise Park was due to the family-friendly environment he cultivated as the manager. Vereen worked tirelessly to promote the attraction, including distributing brochures to schools and churches. These brochures featured photographs taken by Mozert.



Mozert's duties as official photographer of Silver Springs included taking photographs of Paradise Park on land and underwater. He photographed the many events and activities visitors could enjoy at Paradise Park—contestants in the annual Miss Paradise Park contest held over Labor Day weekend, visits from Santa, Easter egg hunts and guests riding in the glass-bottom boats.

In 1952, Mozert met Ginger Stanley, and the two worked together to promote Silver Springs for the next four years. Using the underwater performance techniques she learned as a performer at Weeki Wachee Springs, Stanley was able to pose naturally under the water and hold her breath for long periods of time while Mozert took her photograph. These photographs then appeared in advertisements for Silver Springs throughout the 1950s.



As Florida became an increasingly popular destination for filmmakers in the 1950s, Mozert took behind-the-scenes photographs of celebrities on set, including Johnny Weissmuller and Esther Williams. Mozert even worked as an underwater cameraman for the 1954 monster horror classic *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, which was filmed at Wakulla Springs in north Florida.

After 40 years as a photographer at Silver Springs, Mozert retired in 1985. He died on October 14, 2015, in Ocala, Florida.

The State Archives of Florida accessioned the Bruce Mozert Collection (N2018-20) in 2018. The collection contains approximately 25,000 negatives, thousands of prints and hundreds of films. A selection of Mozert's photographs have been digitized and made available on [FloridaMemory.com](http://FloridaMemory.com).



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